UNITED STATES PATENT APPLICATION

For

FLEXIBLE SEE-THROUGH BOUND DOCUMENT ASSEMBLY

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FLEXIBLE SEE-THROUGH BOUND DOCUMENT ASSEMBLY

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] *Field of the Invention:*

[0002] This invention relates to an inexpensive flexible binder assembly with a professional appearance.

[0003] *Background of the Invention:*

[0004] Conventional hard bound binders with view windows are disclosed in prior art patents such as U.S. Patents Nos. 5,857,797, 5,876,143 and 6,206,602B1; and sheet protectors with cut-away arrangements are also known, see U.S. Patent No. 6,012,86.

INVENTION SUMMARY

[0005] However, there is a need for a simple inexpensive flexible binder which is easy to prepare, and which has a high quality, professional appearance.

[0006] In accordance with one illustrative embodiment of the invention, this object is achieved by the provision of a flexible binder, with a transparent flexible front cover with a frame in the form of a coating. On the inside of the front cover a plastic pocket is provided, and it is firmly secured to the front cover along two edges, with the two other edges of the pocket being free so that visual material may be readily inserted into the pocket.

[0007] The sheet material for the front cover pocket is preferably fairly thin as compared with the cover material; for example the covers may be formed of polypropylene or a blend thereof, in the order of 17 mils thick, while the sheet plastic material for the pocket may be in the order of 7 or 8 mils thick. The pocket is preferably bonded to the inside of the cover just outside the frame, and is slightly larger than standard 8 ½ x 11 inch or A-4 paper. The pocket may be secured along only two edges, the bottom and outer edge, away from the intended binding location, or it may be secured on three sides excluding the top. With this latter construction, it may be cut near but spaced from the binding from the top to near the bottom adjacent the binding. With either construction the sheet bearing the visual material may be readily slipped into place, and the latter construction will have the residual edge of the pocket overlapping

the inner edge of the visual material. The pocket may also be secured to the front cover on three sides, with the flexibility of the covers permitting easy insertion of the visual material through the open side, which may be on any side of the pocket.

[0008] An image of the cover of the binder, showing the frame, or merely an outline or template of the printable area of the frame, may be provided on a computer monitor, and the user may introduce suitable visual material into the area within the frame, and then print out the desired image for insertion into the pocket.

[0009] The binder may include additional tabbed index sheets, opaque or optionally translucent or transparent, permitting the use of additional visual display sheets to introduce each section of the bound material.

[0010] The rear cover is also flexible and may be provided with a partial pocket extending for less than half of the area of the rear cover; and this partial pocket may be formed from an over-size sheet of the back cover sheet material folded to form the rear pocket. The rear pocket may be heat formed, or folded using a score cut and pressure, and glued or adhesively secured to form the pocket. The rear pocket sheet material may optionally be provided with cuts for holding the corners of a business card or the like.

[0011] The rear cover is preferably printed with a dark colored coating, preferably matching the frame on the front cover, but the inner rear partial pocket is preferably transparent so that its contents may be viewed.

[0012] Other objects, features and advantages of the invention will become apparent from a consideration of the following detailed description and from the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0013] Fig. 1 is a plan view of a flexible view binder illustrating the principles of the present invention;

[0014] Fig. 2 is a perspective view of the binder of Fig. 1 with a binder shown with the front cover open and visual material being inserted into the pocket on the inside of the cover;

[0015] Fig. 3 shows a computer terminal including a monitor, a keyboard, and a printer, for forming the visual material to be inserted into the cover of the binder of Figs. 1 and 2;

[0016] Fig. 4 is a diagram showing the securing of a pocket to the inside of the front cover of the binder of Figs. 1 and 2;

[0017] Fig. 5 shows the binder of Figs. 1 and 2 with the front cover open and with tabbed dividers being exposed;

[0018] Fig. 6 is a diagramatic showing of the plastic sheet blank employed in forming the back cover, and the resultant back cover with a pocket formed from the single sheet; and

[0019] Fig. 7 is an inner view of the rear cover of the binder showing the partial pocket.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0020] Referring now to Fig. 1 of the drawings, a flexible view cover binder 12 is shown. The binder 12 includes a comb type binding 14, and a front cover 16 which may be formed of flexible plastic material such as polypropylene. The polypropylene is flexible, but still firm enough to maintain the form of a binder and may, for example, be formed of textured transparent polypropylene in the order of 15 to 20 thousandths of an inch thick. The cover 16 includes a central transparent area 18, and an opaque or very dark colored coating 20 which forms a frame through which a visual insert 22 may be seen.

[0021] Referring to Fig. 2, this view of the binder shows the binder with the front cover open, and the insert 22 being slid into a pocket 24 as indicated by the arrow. The pocket 24 is of relatively thin flexible plastic, and is securely bonded to the cover 16 of the binder 12 along the lower edge 26 and the outer edge 28 of the binder. As shown in Fig. 2 of the drawings, the pocket 24 may be initially bonded to the inner surface of the cover 16 along three edges, with the top edge remaining open; and then a cut 30 may be made so that the visual insert 22 may be more easily and quickly inserted into the pocket. Following insertion within the visible portion of the pocket as shown in Fig. 2, the residual portion, not shown in Fig. 2, is flipped out and completes the retention of the visual material 22 within the pocket.

[0022] Reference is now made to Fig. 3 of the drawings indicating how the visual material 22 may be conveniently prepared for insertion in the pocket 24, with the visual material properly centered within the frame 20 which has been coated onto the cover 16. As indicated in Fig. 3, an image 36 of the framed front cover of the binder is displayed on the monitor 38. Alternatively, as noted above, a line outline or template of the "printable" area of the frame may be displayed. Also shown in Fig. 3 are the keyboard and computer unit 40 and the printer 42. The image 36 may be provided by one or more of any of a number of avenues including downloading from the internet from an Avery website, or alternatively may be provided from a compact disc containing appropriate data for producing the image 36. Using the keyboard 40, and/or images from existing files or from the web, the operator may prepare suitable visual material to be printed onto the visual insert 22, to provide an appearance such as that shown in Fig. 1 of the drawings.

[0023] Incidentally, with regard to dimensions, it is noted that the pocket is preferably of such a size that it will easily accommodate 8 ½ x 11 inch sheets. It is also noted that some transparent tabbed dividers may be employed for the contents of the binder. Accordingly, the front and rear covers of the binder may be approximately 9 ½ x 11 ½ inches in size; and the size of the pocket may be approximately 9 x 11 inches.

[0024] In Fig. 4 of the drawings, the inner pocket 22 is shown bonded to the cover 12 along the bottom and left hand edge, with the top and right hand edge being free for rapid loading of the visual insert sheet. This is a variation of the construction shown in Fig. 2, but in both cases the pocket has the upper edge and an inner edge free to permit rapid loading.

[0025] Now, turning to Fig. 5 of the drawings, the front cover has been turned back, and the comb type spine 14 is visible at the left in Fig. 5. The top sheet is a transparent divider sheet with a tab 46 which reads "Summary". Other tabs 48 are also visible in Fig. 5 as is the upper edge of the rear cover 50 of the binder. The first heading sheet 52 behind the transparent index sheet 46 has the titles of the section on it; and in this case the title read "Profit Exceeds Forecast" and "Profit Jump 40%". These titles may be on clippings secured to the heading sheet; or they may be printed directly on the heading sheet, but are visible through the tabbed binder sheet.

[0026] Reference is now made to Fig. 6 of the drawings which shows in the left hand view the shape of the rear cover 50 before it is folded to form the actual completed back cover, as shown in the right view of Fig. 6. In Fig. 6, the pocket 52 is initially folded up and heat formed into its folded position; and similarly the securing tab 54 is bent over on top of the outer edge of the pocket 52, folded, and then sealed, or bonded by adhesive, to the pocket portion 52. With both the back cover 50 and the pocket 52 being formed of fairly flexible but stiff polypropylene preferably between 0.015 and 0.020 inch thick, the pocket 52 is stiff enough to easily retain papers in the course of normal usage.

[0027] It may also be noted that the rear pocket 52 may be provided with a series of cuts 56 which are intended to retain a business card or other similar sized sheet material.

[0028] Fig. 7 is a print of the inside of the rear cover of the binder, with the comb binding element 14 shown at the left, and with the pocket 52 and the flap 54 visible in this showing. The opaque nature of the rear cover preferably having the same coloration as the frame on the front cover may also be noted. Business card 58 has been inserted into the slits 56.

[0029] In the present specification and claims the binder covers are sometimes referred to as being "semi-flexible". In this regard, when the binder is rested on a flat surface and a pen is placed parallel to the spine of the binder between the cover and the remainder of the sheet material, the cover will flex so that the outer edge of the cover will just touch the remaining sheet material. As noted above, when textured polypropylene sheet material, about 15 – 20 mils thick is used, this type of semi-flexibility is achieved. Other plastic sheet material may be used with somewhat different stiffness and thickness to achieve the same semi-flexible results.

[0030] In conclusion, it is to be understood that the foregoing detailed description and the drawings illustrate the principles of the invention. However, various alternatives and modifications may be employed without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. Thus, by way of example and not of limitation other types of bindings may be used instead of the plastic strip comb type binding shown. Plastic material other than polypropylene may be used. The binders may be formed to accommodate legal size or

half sheet size paper. Accordingly, the invention is not limited to the specific embodiment shown in the drawings and described in detail herein.